

UUCP Trail Guide



*A Self-Guided Tour
Along the
UUCP Trail*

Please return this booklet to the lobby once you are finished with your tour. Thank you!



We will begin our tour of the UUCP Nature Trail at this wooden bench overlooking the Sonoran Desert of Paradise Valley. The mountain that you see in the distance is Camelback Mountain.

Our tour first takes us through a *riparian area* where water funnels through rocky washes during a rain. You will notice the presence of tall trees and an abundance of smaller shrubs.

The *Yucca* in the foreground has spiny elongated leaves. It is sometimes called the Spanish Bayonet for good reason. Each of its leaves possesses a barbed tip. The Yucca will put out a lily-like flower on a single two-to-five-foot stalk. They usually open at night. Yucca is often confused with the Agave plant, but the leaves of the Agave are much broader.

Uses: Yucca tea has been used in the treatment of joint inflammation. It is also an effective sudsing agent and the root has been used for shampoo.



Wildlife Watch: The Cactus Wren

The Cactus Wren is the state bird of Arizona. It has a loud voice that is easily heard in the desert. The Cactus Wren eats insects. It nests in the Saguaro cactus by pecking a hole in the Saguaro and cleaning out a small cave for its nest. The Saguaro heals around the hole, so this doesn't hurt the cactus and the nest can be reused in future breeding seasons.



The *Desert Willow* grows along washes and other waterways. It is not a true willow, but is related to the Catalpa or Bean-Tree. It is a willowy shrub with long leaves that are about as wide as a pencil. Its flowers (shown in the picture) are shaped like a trumpet and have a musky fragrance.

Uses: Native Americans used the wood for bows. The flowers may be dried and brewed for a tea. Powdered leaves and bark are anti-fungal and can be used to treat stings, cuts and scratches.



Wildlife Watch: Coyote

What big teeth you have, Mr. Coyote! The coyote is a member of the dog family. He is about the size of a Collie with a round bushy tail. Coyotes can definitely be aggressive. Newcomers to the desert might be tempted to view them as dogs, but they are skilled hunters and will carry off a Chihuahua as soon as a rabbit. Coyotes have a long lingering howl as well as a distinctive yip-yip-yip that they use to keep in touch with other coyotes in the area.



The *Mesquite* is a thorny and often shrub-like tree. It is in the Legume family and has edible seeds. It produces a long yellow flower in the spring that is very attractive to bees. Mesquite honey is a delicacy. The thorns of the Mesquite are in pairs and are straight. Mesquite pods do not open when ripe. Animals eat the seed pods and spread the seeds through their excrement. The Mesquite is the most common shrub or small tree in the Southwest.

Uses: Mesquite tea has the property of inhibiting diarrhea and other GI intestinal tract inflammations. The bark can be boiled to produce a cleansing disinfectant wash. Mesquite sap, boiled down, will form an effective glue. The sweet pods collected in September or October make an excellent molasses.



Wildlife Watch: Gambel's Quail

Gambel's quail are often seen taking a leisurely stroll across the desert in family groups called coveys. The male is recognized by the bright red on the top of his head. Both the male and the female have distinctive black top knots. Their vocalization is a very pleasant coo that is a defining sound of the desert.



The ***Palo Verde*** tree is well described by its Spanish name, which means “green stick.” The entire tree from trunk to branches to leaves is a bright green color. In the spring it is decorated with vivid yellow flowers that have the appearance of buttered popcorn. If you look closely at a Palo Verde flower you will see that the largest petal is creamy white. Like the mesquite, the Palo Verde is a legume and possesses edible seeds.

Uses: The seeds of the Palo Verde can be ground into meal and used for flatbread or porridge. The seeds are quite sweet and can be eaten right from the tree. Just shell them as you would peas. The wood, however, is very soft and cannot be used for fuel or building purposes.



Wildlife Watch: Cottontail Rabbit and Jack Rabbit

These two bunnies can be confused. On the left is a Cottontail rabbit. It is a true rabbit and very plentiful in the desert. Its white puff of a tail is its defining characteristic. The cottontail rarely needs to drink as it gets its moisture from plants, especially the Prickly Pear and Barrel cacti. During the hot months of the summer they can be found stretched out under a shady tree or Creosote bush.

The bunny on the left is a Jack Rabbit. Although it is called a rabbit, it is really a hare. Hares do not have their babies underground in burrows as rabbits do. They live above ground and have their babies in nests. Unlike rabbits, they have not been domesticated for pets. The Jack Rabbit's long ears are its defining feature and it has a powerful jump. They can leap up to 19 feet.



The *Ocotillo* in the middle of the picture is often mistakenly called a cactus, but is really a shrub. It is related to the Boojum tree of Baja. The long stems of the Ocotillo are covered with thick thorns. The stems only have leaves during the rainy season. At that time the Ocotillo will put out a vivid crimson flower from the tips of its stems. Ocotillos can grow to be twenty feet tall, but such great height can be its downfall. The root system is very shallow and a strong wind can topple a tall Ocotillo.

Uses: The stems of a fallen Ocotillo can be chopped into uniform pieces and planted in the ground to form a living fence. The flowers create a pleasant sweet/tart tea, but it is difficult to gather them from a twelve-foot-high extremely prickly Ocotillo.



Wildlife Watch: The Road Runner

Here is a Road Runner on the lookout for the wily coyote. The Road Runner is a member of the cuckoo family. It can fly, but spends most of its time on the ground. The Road Runner eats insects but really enjoys the occasional lizard. It can run at speeds up to 15 mph! It makes a very unbird-like clacking sound with its beak.



The ***Ironwood*** tree is one of our most unique and beautiful trees. Its bark is slate gray and its tiny leaves a dark green. In the spring the Ironwood blossoms with small purple flowers that complement the grey/green color scheme very well. Like Mesquites and Palo Verdes, Ironwoods are also in the legume family. To germinate, the thickly coated seeds must pass through the digestive system of a grazing animal. Ironwood is one of the world's heaviest woods, as anyone who tries to chop one down will soon learn. One cubic foot weighs 66 pounds.

Uses: The wood makes excellent firewood. The heat it produces is intense and the coals long-lasting. The wood can also be carved and polished to make tool handles and even sculptures.



Wildlife Watch: Anna's Hummingbird

Anna's Hummingbird is the most commonly seen hummingbird in our area. It loves bright colored red or yellow flowers and will often visit the Paloverdes when they are in bloom. The Anna's Hummingbird especially enjoys Penstemon flowers. During courtship the hummingbirds will sing a thin, squeaky song and the males will perform a display dive, zooming straight up in the air then swooping down in order to impress the females.



The *Creosote* bush is a ubiquitous presence in the Sonoran desert. It can be found as high up as 5,500 feet but really dominates our low-lying areas. It is the Creosote bush that gives our desert that unique Southwest deserty smell after a rain. The small leaves of the Creosote are covered with a waxy substance that enables it to survive long periods of drought. The flowers are a vivid yellow and will appear any time of the year after a rain. The flowers mature into fuzzy round seeds that affix themselves to the coats of animals and are thereby spread.

Uses: Creosote salve can be used as a skin dressing to slow the rate of growth of bacteria. Creosote tea is said to be an effective cough syrup, but very few have the ability to choke the bitter stuff down.



The riparian area ends here at this old adobe bench. Relax and enjoy some welcome Palo Verde shade before you head out into the *Sonoran Desert*. When you resume your tour you will notice the vegetation is sparser and the Palo Verde trees much smaller. These plants must survive with much less water.



Wildlife Watch: Scorpion

Yes, you could very well turn over a rock on the desert and find this little surprise underneath. Scorpions are quite common on the Sonoran desert. They are known to invade carports, sheds and even homes. Surprisingly, the smaller scorpions are the more dangerous. The tiny Bark Scorpion has venom that packs a much bigger wallop than the Giant Desert Hairy Scorpion. Scorpion stings really hurt with an intense burning sensation, but they are rarely life-threatening. They pose the biggest threat to small children and animals.



White Ratany is not an impressive plant when it is not in bloom. It looks like a collection of dried twigs. But in the summer months after a rain it is decorated with iridescent little magenta flowers. The plant remains small with fuzzy whitish leaves that give it an “unfocused” appearance.

Uses: White Ratany is an excellent astringent. It can be boiled down and used as a tincture for sore gums and mouth sores. South American Ratany has been gathered by the ton for medicinal use. Our little species couldn’t survive such intense gathering.



Wildlife Watch: Rattlesnake

Let's hope you don't see this fellow! And you probably won't. Rattlesnakes are shy creatures and do their best to stay well away from the human population. They even give a warning signal should anyone approach too near. The vast majority of rattlesnake bites occur when the human in the encounter decides to bother the rattlesnake. Should you ever see a rattlesnake, or hear one, calmly change your course to a different direction. Our snakes are most active during the warming months of the spring. It is *always* a good idea to stay on established trails when hiking in the desert.



It may be hard to recognize them, but these are two *Saguaro Cacti* nestling in the protection of a White Ratany. The White Ratany is acting as a nurse plant. Young Saguaro need these nurse plants in order to successfully germinate and survive the heat of the desert sun. Creosote bushes and Paloverde trees also serve as nurses for Saguaros. This pair will grow very slowly. They may have taken up to 15 years to reach one inch. By the time they are 10 to 20 feet tall and sporting arms, they may be up to 200 years old!

Uses: The red pear-shaped fruit of the Saguaro is delicious when ripe. The fruit makes an excellent jelly for those with long enough poles to gather them. The ribs of a dead Saguaro can be used for fencing.

The Statuary Garden is to the north of this point in the trail. Follow the trail up to the benches to complete your self-guided tour. We hope you have enjoyed your time in our intriguing Sonoran Desert.

Please return the Self-Guided Tour Booklet to the lobby. Thank you for your participation!



The Green Sanctuary Committee invites you to learn more about the Sonoran Desert by visiting:

Desert Botanical Garden
1201 N Galvin Pkwy
Phoenix, AZ 85008
(480) 941-1225

Boyce Thompson Arboretum
37615 U.S. Highway 60
Superior, AZ 85273
520-689-2723

Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum
2021 North Kinney Road
Tucson, Arizona 85743
Phone: (520) 883-2702